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CHIROPRACTORS WARN SCHOOL BAGS BAD FOR BACKS

The Chiropractors' Association of Australia - SA (CAASA) has called on Australia's educators to rethink the load they are placing on students' backs – literally.

"There is mounting evidence pointing to the fact that heavily laden school bags place unnecessary stress on growing spines and can lead to acute and long-term back problems," warned CAASA President, Zoe Love, Chiropractor.

"Lugging an overloaded school bag to and from school is an outdated concept that must be discouraged.

"Why treat our kids as pack horses when most of the information they need at school or for homework could be contained on a tiny memory stick?"

According to Love, a growing child should limit the weight they carry in a school backpack to no more than 10 per cent of their body weight.

"That's only around 4-5 kilos for a 40-50kg student and it quickly adds up when you throw in a few text books, pencil case, lunch box and water bottle," she said.

A survey by Chiropractors' Association Australia in Victoria into the average bag weights of 1,000 children found that almost half (486 children) carried bags well over the 10 per cent recommendation.

"Lifting a bag that is too heavy causes immediate strain on the spine," Love explained. "The longer a child carries that load, the more severe the damage.

"The problem is compounded even further by badly loaded bags, poor posture and the 'fashion factor' which dictates the latest trendy way for carrying the bag, usually negating any inbuilt ergonomic features."

With the 2010 school year about to kick off, Love is realistic about the fact that we have a long way to go before heavy text books are replaced with memory sticks and she is encouraging parents and students to brush up on their bag carrying technique now to prevent problems later in life.

The CAASA recommends a fitted backpack, worn properly – over both shoulders with the waist band done up – as a growing back's best bet, while wheeled bag options should be treated with caution.

"A wheeled bag with an extendable handle may seem like a good solution for a heavy load but they aren't designed for the routine wear and tear that a trip to school entails," Love explained.

"Students may have to pull a bag over rough ground or grassy areas as well as lift it up stairs and on and off public transport. All of these actions impact normal posture and could prove problematic in the long run."

To avoid the back to school backache, the Chiropractors' Association of Australia recommends:

- ✓ Backpacks should be no heavier than 10 per cent of a student's weight when packed.
- ✓ Make sure the backpack is sturdy and appropriately sized – no wider than the student's chest.
- ✓ Put comfort and fit at the top of the priority list, rather than good looks.
- ✓ Choose a backpack with broad, padded shoulder straps.
- ✓ Use both shoulder straps – never sling the pack over one shoulder.
- ✓ Use waist straps attached – they are there for a good reason.
- ✓ Don't wear the backpack any lower than the hollow of the lower back.
- ✓ Don't overload the backpack – use school lockers and plan homework well in advance.
- ✓ Place all heavy items at the base of the pack, close to the spine, for a better distribution of the weight.

ENDS

For more information please contact Gray Management Group

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About the Chiropractors Association of Australia, South Australia (CAASA) Members of the Chiropractors Association of Australia SA (CAASA) are registered, primary contact health professionals who undertake a minimum of five years of university training across three government universities in Australia. Chiropractors usually work in their own private practice or in clinics with other healthcare professionals. They may also act as allied health consultants in areas including occupational health and safety, sport, rehabilitation, health insurance assessment and medico-legal advising.

CAASA's mission is **"To empower all people to experience greater health and wellness through an active, lifelong process of healthy lifestyle choices"**.

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